

A
S E R M O N
U P O N

Witchcraft.

Occasion'd by a Late
ILLEGAL ATTEMPT
T O

Discover Witches by Swimming.

Preach'd at

T W Y F O R D,
I N T H E
C O U N T Y of *LEICESTER*,
J U L Y 11, 1736.

By *J O S E P H J U X O N*,
Vicar of *Twyford* and *Hungarton*.

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EXODUS xxii. 18.

*Thou shalt not suffer a Witch
to live.*

THE great Intent of the Jewish Lawgiver was to preserve the Honour due to the Name of the true God. All the several Precepts and Prohibitions of the Levitical Law, are either essential Doctrines of true Religion, or so many Guards and Caveats against Idolatry and Superstition. Because the Nations of the World had corrupted themselves, paid Divine Worship, and offer'd Incense to the great Luminaries of
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Heaven, we have a very particular Account (*Gen. i.*) of the *Creation of the Heavens and the Earth*, that all Mankind might know, that the *true* God *made* those things, which the Heathens worshipp'd as Gods. Because a great variety of false Gods was worshipp'd in *Egypt*, and Images resembling Men, and Beasts, and other Creatures were erected to their Honour; all manner of *Images*, and *Similitudes of things*, whether in *Heaven*, or in *the Earth*, or in *the Waters under the Earth*, are strictly and solemnly forbidden the People of God. *Deut. iv. 23.* And because this People had fallen into the most shameful Apostacy, they are kept for forty Years together in the Wilderness, a separate People from all the Nations of the World, that they may unlearn their evil Ways and Customs, and the rising Generation be train'd up in the Knowledge of the divine Laws, and an Abhor-

Abhorrence of the *Idols* and *Abominations* of the Heathens. This was plainly the Drift of those Laws, which made a distinction betwixt Beasts that were *clean* and *unclean*; there being no manner of danger, that Men should worship those Creatures as Gods, which they killed and lived upon every day; and less danger still, that they should be inclined to serve others, which they were taught to look upon with Aversion as impure and abominable. Because the Ram was ador'd as the Symbol or Representation of the chief God of the *Egyptians*, and solemn Festivals at an appointed time of the Year, were observed in his honour, in opposition hereto, the *Passover* (beside what respect it bore to the Death of Christ, the *Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*, Rev. xiii. 8.) was instituted to be religiously observed by the Jews, at this very Season, when this Idol, instead of re-

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ceiving divine Honours, was to be profaned and insulted, and to have his Blood dashed against the Doors of their Houses ; a perpetual Memorial of *Israel's* Deliverance, of God's Glory, and of *Egypt's* Shame. And as great Care was thus taken to guard against all idolatrous and superstitious Practices, and secure the Reverence due to the Name and Laws of the living God ; so very severe Penalties were annexed to the Transgression of these Laws, and very exemplary Punishments to be inflicted upon those, who by any Remains of their former Folly and Superstition, should defile the Worship, and weaken the Authority of the Lord their God. As God himself had taken the *Israelites* under his peculiar Protection, that God whose Hand *had created the Heavens and the Earth* ; there was no occasion to ask counsel at the hands of evil and seducing Spirits, neither indeed could any do this, without

without flying from Strength to Weakness, from Wisdom to Folly, without calling in question the Power and Goodness of Providence, and incurring the Guilt of the most monstrous Disobedience and Rebellion. Hence it is that this People is called upon, *Levit. xix. 31. Regard not them that have familiar Spirits, neither seek after Wizards to be defiled by them*; and this is enforced with a very powerful Reason, *I am the Lord your God*. And they are expressly commanded not only not to consult or regard these Deceivers, but to shew 'em no manner of Favour or Compassion; and it is made even a part of their Constitution, not to suffer 'em so much as to live amongst 'em. *A Man also or Woman that hath a familiar Spirit, or that is a Wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with Stones; their Blood shall be upon them.* Lev. xx. 27. And of the same nature,

ture, and for the very same reason also, is the Prohibition in the Text, *Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live.*

It may be of use from hence to observe,

- I. What were the Witches, the Wizards, or they who had familiar Spirits that are spoken of in Scripture.
- II. The Ground and Reason of that Law, which made the Punishment of these Crimes Capital, *Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live* ; from whence we shall be qualified to judge,
- III. Of the Truth and Wisdom of modern Notions of Witchcraft, which have no other Foundation than Ignorance and Superstition.

And, I. Let us see what were the *Witches*, the *Wizards*, and they who
had

had *familiar Spirits*, that are spoken of in Scripture.

This is extremely necessary, because they who have entertain'd the grossest Notions of Witchcraft, think they have some colour for 'em, even in the Word of God. Now the Crime of all these Persons was the same. It was a very execrable Species of Idolatry, which had been learnt and brought up out of *Egypt*. It was a consulting, or at least a pretending to consult Dæmons or evil Spirits, for the Direction of human Affairs, and the Knowledge of things to come. But now as God in Scripture affirms this Knowledge of Futurity to be his own peculiar Right and Prerogative, as he challenges all the false Gods of the Heathens, the Dæmons which they worshipped, to *declare the things which shall be hereafter*, Isa. xli. 21, 22. it appears that the very Attempt to give light into things to come, things which
neither

neither Men nor Devils could foresee or understand, was a very great and heinous Sin. It was ascribing that *Power* to inferiour Spirits, which *belongeth only unto God* ; it was practising upon the Weakness and Credulity of Mankind in the most shameful manner ; it was sending Men for Information, where it was not possible it should be had, and inspiring 'em with false Hopes or false Fears, thro' vain and wicked Delusions. Neither was this all, but it was striking at the very root of the Belief of a Providence, and taking away the Necessity of the Worship of God, if other Beings besides him have the disposal of the Affairs of this World, and are always at hand, as often as they are called upon, to resolve the Doubts, and relieve the Wants and Necessities of Men. This is the Nature and Tendency of that Witchcraft, which is condemned in Scripture, and all the ridiculous Charms and Incantations

tions, which wicked Persons made use of, had no other End, excepting that of private Gain, than to draw the Hearts of the People off from God, and to dispose 'em to return to the abominable Worship of those false Gods, which their Fathers served in the Land of *Egypt*. It is not material to enquire, whether these Deceivers of Mankind had any real Intercourse and Commerce with evil Spirits or no. If they had not, they deserved Punishment as wicked Lyars and impudent Impostors. If they had, still they undertook for more, than it was possible for 'em to perform, and merited the Reward of those, who taught Men to forsake God, and trust in Vanity and Delusions. Tho' if any Judgment is to be formed from the Names that are given 'em in Scripture, they don't seem to be possess'd of much real Power; but perhaps the whole of their Art was Juggle and Imposture. The

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Wizards,

Wizards, Interpreters inform us, had their name given 'em from a *Hebrew* Word, which signifies a Bottle or hollow Vessel, on account of the muttering way of speaking which prevail'd amongst the People. Thus in *Isaiab* viii. 19. they are said to *peep, and to mutter*; and in a Judgment denounced by God in this same Prophecy, it is written (xxix. 4.) *Thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the Ground, and thy Speech shall be low out of the Dust, and thy Voice shall be as one that hath a familiar Spirit, out of the Ground, and thy Speech shall whisper out of the Dust.* Before I proceed, I ought to inform you, that this Phrase of having a *familiar Spirit*, by no means expresses the Sense of the original Language, which ought to have been render'd a Ventriloquist, or Person who had an Art of speaking with a hollow Voice, as if the Words proceeded, not out of the Mouth

Mouth, but from the Cavity of the Belly : and it had been much to the honour of our Translators, if in complaisance to no one living, they had not suffer'd the Expression of a *familiar Spirit* to have crept into our Bible. Now, since this was the Practice of these Seducers to counterfeit Voices, and speak in a low unintelligible way; this looks as if they were conscious to themselves of the Vanity and Deceitfulness of their own Art, that they durst not speak plain and out, thro' fear of laying themselves open and exposing their Skill; whereas low imperfect Sounds were extremely well adapted to deceive those, who came to consult 'em, and to dismiss 'em in great Darknes and Uncertainty.

There is only one Passage that I can recollect in the whole Scriptures, (unless the Contest between *Pharaoh's* Magicians and *Moses* may be esteemed another) which seems to ascribe any

real Power to these People; and that is the Case of *Saul*, when God *had forsaken him*, and in great Distress and Perplexity of Spirit, he applied to a Woman versed in this wicked Art. But a very worthy and judicious Author has shewn, that it is at least extremely probable, that this Affair is related only in the manner that it appeared unto *Saul*. And indeed when the several Circumstances hereof are well considered, the desperate State of this unfortunate Prince's Affairs, the low dispirited Condition he was in, having taken no Sustenance for four and twenty Hours together; 1 *Sam.* xxviii. 20. the Distance of his Camp from the Place of the Woman's Habitation, whither he might go and return in the space of one Night, so that probably she might know him, the Largeness of his Stature, he being *higher than any of the People by the Shoulders and upwards*, that if she
had

had never seen him, she could not possibly mistake the Person; the Convenience of the Night for carrying on an Imposture; the Appearance of a *pretended Samuel* to the Woman *only*, for the King is terrified with her Relation, and falls with his face to the ground, without seeing any thing at all himself: The fit Opportunity this afforded to a Ventriloquist to display her Art, by assuming an artificial Voice, the Impropriety of raising the Prophet out of the ground, rather than calling him down from Heaven; the absolute Impossibility of an infamous Woman disturbing the Repose of a good Man in the other World; the Answer return'd to the King, that *the Lord had rent his Kingdom from him*, which every soul in *Israel* had learnt at the hands of the true *Samuel* long before; and the very remarkable Addition, *to-morrow thou and thy Sons shall be with me, tho' the Battle was*
not

not fought on the morrow, nor till some Days after, neither were the Sons of *Saul* then *all* slain, but two of them long surviv'd the Death of their Father: when all these Circumstances are considered, together with the Possibility that *Saul* himself, weak and wounded as he was, might have escaped, had he not given too much credit to the words of a base Woman, and unhappily chose to be his own Executioner, rather than fall into the hands of the *Philistines*; there seems no occasion to have recourse to infernal Aid, to solve the Difficulties of this Case; but where there are so many evident Characters of Deceit and Imposture, such ambiguous, absurd, or false Answers returned, nothing can well be concluded in favour of this wretched Art, or of the Power of those who use it, from this Transaction. However, thus much is plain and certain from this Instance, as well as many others, that the only

Witches

Witches which the Scripture knows any thing of, were they who drew People off from the true God, and taught 'em to expect Relief and Direction at the hands of evil Spirits, which they undertook to consult for 'em. Thus when *Saul* had *disobeyed the Voice of the Lord in sparing the Amalekites*, the Prophet rebukes him for his Sin, and tells him, 1 Sam. xv. 23. *That Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft, and Stubbornness as Iniquity and Idolatry*; that is, a Man might as well forsake God and worship Idols, which is the Witchcraft here intended, as pretend to worship God, and at the same time not keep his Commandments. And thus it is the Answer of *Jebu*, to the Messenger sent to demand of him, *Is it Peace?* (2 Kings ix. 22.) *What Peace so long as the Whoredoms of thy Mother Jezebel, and her Witchcrafts are so many?* Now there are no other *Whoredoms* or *Witchcrafts* recorded

corded of *Jezebel*, but the spiritual ones of forsaking the God of *Israel*, and establishing the Worship of *Baal*. But the Case is too plain to need insisting on any longer. Let us therefore see,

II. What was the Ground and Reason of that Law, which made the Punishment of Witchcraft capital. *Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live.*

Now this, from what has been observed, is exceeding plain. When God delivered his own People out of *Egypt*, and gave 'em a perfect Law of Righteousness, that true Religion might be restored, and all Idolatry suppress'd for ever; instead of those ambiguous and delusive Answers, which wicked and deceitful Persons pretended to receive from the Spirits which they applied to, the great God of Heaven and Earth became the Oracle, which the *Israelites* on all Occasions had the happiness to consult, and

and with great Faithfulness informed and directed his People. Now after this invaluable Exchange, for any to return from Light to Darkness, from the Truth of God to the Delusions of Devils, what was this but to adhere still to their old Profanations, and to despise the Authority of that God, who *had done such great things for 'em?* It was in effect to declare, that Idols might benefit Mankind as much as the true God could ; that the Counsel and Protection of Heaven was nothing worth, and that all *the Statutes and Judgments*, which God had given unto his People, were only so many vain and unprofitable things. Now this was striking at the very Root of the Jewish Constitution. To instill such Notions as these into the Minds of Men, was sowing Sedition in the most barefaced manner, and telling 'em they needed no longer to shew any Reverence for the Laws of their Country, or any

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Regard

Regard for the Authority of that God, who had so visibly demonstrated himself, and whom they all recognized, their Lord and King. If then such Principles and Practices as these were tolerated, it is plain there was an end of that Government, which God had set up in the World; and therefore it was indispensably necessary, that such incorrigible Offenders, who thus *set their Mouths against Heaven*, and bid defiance to the *Most High*, should receive the Reward of *Rebels* and *Traytors*, and be markt out as Examples, a Warning and a Terrour to all future Generations. This was the Ground and Reason of the Command, *Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live*. The Honour of God, and the Safety of his People required their utter Extirpation. And now from hence we may proceed to consider,

III. The Truth and Wisdom of modern Notions of Witchcraft, which have no other Foundation than Ignorance or Superstition.

If there are any amongst you, who are publick Advocates for Idolatry, labouring to deceive you by their *Vanities*, and teaching you to rely no longer on the Providence of God; if there are any amongst you who professedly declare that by their Art in consulting evil and seducing Spirits, they can procure you that Favour and Protection, which Heaven alone can grant; these, and these only, are the Witches the Scripture knows any thing of, and whom you have any Warrant or Authority from thence to cut off. But then this you are to do, not upon any uncertain fallacious Experiments, not upon your own private Judgment or Conviction, but by appealing to the Laws of your Country, by prosecuting 'em in a fair and le-

gal way, and supporting your Accu-
 sations by evidence of plain and no-
 torious Facts. But if instead of this
 you have framed to yourselves a dif-
 ferent Notion of Witchcraft, a Power
 thro' the Confederacy of evil Spirits,
 not of doing good, but of doing mis-
 chief in the World; a Power to take
 away the Property, to destroy the
 Corn, or the Cattle, or grieve and
 torture the Bodies of innocent Per-
 sons with horrid Pains and incurable
 Diseases; you are not to expect any
 Instance of this kind, or any Foun-
 dation for this in the Word of Truth,
 the sacred Oracles of God, but you
 must look back into the Days of
 Darkness and Superstition; you must
 rake into the very Dregs of Heathe-
 nism and Popery, before you can
 find any such lying Legends, which
 have been propagated only by weak
 and credulous People, and believed
 by none but those, who are weak
 and credulous as they. Indeed if
 there

there be any Credit to be given to the Word of that God, who *cannot lye* or deceive, it is impossible that these things should be true. We are there taught, that the good Man is always under the Care and Protection of Providence, that (*Psf. xci. 4, 5, 6, 7, 10.*) *the Faithfulness and Truth of God are his Shield and his Buckler, that he shall not be afraid for any Terrour by Night, nor for the Arrow that flieth by Day; for the Pestilence that walketh in Darknes, nor for the Sickness that destroyeth in the Noon-day; that tho' a thousand fall beside him, and ten thousand at his right Hand, still no Evil shall happen unto him, nor any Plague come nigh his Dwelling.* We are there taught that God's providential Care and Goodness extends even to the *Fowls of the Air*, Mat. vi. 26. and the *Flowers of the Field*; and that with respect to ourselves, there is not *so much as a Hair of our Head*

Head but what is *numbered* by our Heavenly Father. *Mat. x. 30.* After these solemn and gracious Declarations and Assurances, how then is it possible to fear that the Emissaries of the Powers of Darkness, should be able to hurt us? This is more than even the Devil himself can do, whom *if we resist*, we are taught by an Apostle under the Inspiration of God, that *he shall flee from us*, (*James iv. 7.*) It is then not only great Weakness, but great Sinfulness to ascribe so much as many are inclined to do to Diabolical Powers: it is giving the God of Truth the lye; it is a flat Denial of his Government of the World, and of the Wisdom and Goodness of his Providence; it is exalting infernal Spirits into the Seat of God, and assigning 'em a Commission to scatter Plagues and Curses throughout the World, from that Throne where to our comfort the Sovereign Lord of the Universe sits, and reigns to shower
down

down his Blessings upon us. But surely where any are so weak, or so wicked as this, after they have thus provoked the God of Heaven to forsake 'em, there can be no Occasion to have recourse to *Witchcraft*, in order to account for any Evils that are suffered to befall 'em, and much less so, where these Evils are such as may proceed from natural Causes, *and are common unto Men*. Is it not most intolerable then that mere natural Effects, or the divine Judgments upon us for our Sins, instead of teaching us to repent and reform our Lives, should only teach us more and more to dishonour the Name of God, to magnify the Power of his greatest Enemy, and to take away the good Name, or perhaps seek the Life of those, who have neither Inclination nor Power to do us any Evil? Must innocent Persons suffer thro' our Dreams? or the Blood of those, *for whom Christ died*, be pour'd out a Sacrifice to our ground-
less

less and wicked Suspicions? Besides, who are these formidable People, who can thus alarm and strike terror into a whole Neighbourhood? They are usually such as are destitute of Friends, bow'd down with Years, laden with Infirmities; so far from annoying others, as not to have it in their power to take care of themselves, and oftentimes in Capacity so despicably weak, that you will find none more so, except it be amongst those who give credit to such idle Delusions. And yet, I know not how it happens, but there is so much superstitious Fear, and this is so deeply rooted, in the Minds of Men, that whenever the Alarm is given, there is always a Party formed, a very powerful one too, against these poor ignorant and helpless Creatures.

I should not have dwelt so long on this Subject, but that you all know the Reasons, and that whenever absurd and false Notions of Witchcraft

craft begin to be revived, no one can see to the End and Consequence of these things ; and it is every Man's Duty, be his Station what it will, to discountenance and check 'em in the very Beginning. For notwithstanding Persons of ill Fame may be accused at first, (tho' at present this is not the Case) yet the Suspicion may fall at last on those of unblemish'd Characters and Reputation. In our own Country we have in former times had some few Instances of terrible Executions on this account ; and abroad, there has been such havoc made, probably too of innocent Persons, a whole Country thrown into such Fear and Consternation, the best and most virtuous amongst 'em at length so suspected and censured, that there was no Peace to be had, 'till an effectual Stop was put to such unrighteous Accusations ; and then the Terror and the Danger vanish'd together. There is no Fear indeed,

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that in our Days, whilst Truth and Knowledge prevails, and after the good Care that our Legislature has taken of us, any should now suffer by the hands of Publick Justice, on the score of Witchcraft any more. But when private Persons, without any Authority, and by vain and deceitful Tests, take upon 'em to determine the Guilt or Innocence of Persons unjustly suspected, it is high time to put a stop to such Proceedings, which must at best cast a lasting Odium on the Name of those who are accused, may possibly end in the Death of some of 'em; and if it should, must expose those who are the Cause of it, to the Punishment due unto Murderers, both in this World, and in the World to come.

Instead then of bringing any wicked Accusations against your Brethren, and trusting to foolish unwarrantable Experiments to support these Accusations, *believe in God, cast all*
your

your Care upon him, and be assur'd, that in Proportion to your Faith and Trust, he will care for you, 1 Pet. v. 7. Direct your Lives in his Fear, and no evil can befall you. Let your Hearts be set upon Righteousness, and walk in the way of his Commandments; and all the Powers of Earth and of Hell, shall not be able to hurt you. For this you have the Word of a faithful God, who has declared with as great Truth as Solemnity, and in Words too forcible and elegant to be express'd in our Language, Heb. xiii. 5. that he will never never leave you, and never, no, never never will forsake you.





P O S T S C R I P T.

HAVING observed, that it is at least dubious, whether the Scripture ascribes any *real* Power to the *Witches*, the *Sorcerers*, &c. there mentioned, it may be of use to some to add the following Note.

The *Witchcrafts* mentioned by *St. Paul*, *Gal. v. 20.* are φαρμαχείαι, poisonous Compositions administred to take away Men's Lives, or possibly malignant Doctrines, as fatal to the Soul, as Poison to the Body. The *Pythonefs*, or *Damsel possess'd with a Spirit of Divination*, *Acts xvi. 16.* which brought her Masters much Gain by Soothsaying, was of the same kind mentioned before εγλασπίματος, or *Ventriloqua*; and how fallacious

lacious and uncertain the Answers of these Diviners were, has been observed already. *Simon Magus, who bewitched the Samaritans with his Sorceries*, Acts viii. 9. μαγεύων καὶ ἐξιζών, who astonish'd 'em with his Magick Performances, did this to advance himself into the Seat of God: They said, v. 10. from the *least to the greatest, This Man is the great Power of God*, without any Rebuke from him for so saying. Now this shews the Witchcraft here spoken of to be of the antient, and not the modern Stamp. And whether the People were amazed at *real*, or only amused with fictitious and *lying Wonders*, the Text does not determine. It is written, Rev. xviii. 23. *by thy Sorceries were all Nations deceived*, and yet it will hardly be deemed warrantable to interpret these Sorceries of *supernatural Acts*, or to ascribe a Power of working *real* Miracles to the Church of *Rome*. And if in this
Case

Case it is not allowable, where is the Necessity of doing it in the other? The Case of *Possession* is no way favourable to our common Notions of Witchcraft. For tho' we have various Accounts in the Gospel of human Bodies tortur'd by the Entrance of *unclean Spirits* into 'em, still there is no Intimation, that this was the Effect of what we now call *Witchcraft*, or that these Spirits were only the Agents of wicked Persons, who set 'em to work. On the contrary, we have great Reason to conclude, that God for very wise Ends permitted this, *viz.* to give us sensible proof of the Disposition of evil Spirits to hurt and destroy, unless restrain'd by a good and gracious Providence; to assert the Authority of Christ over Devils; to manifest his Power to deliver out of their hands; and to convince all Mankind of the Necessity of flying from the Destroyer to the Saviour of Souls. Agreeably

ably hereto, we find that it was not in the power of a whole Legion of Devils, so much as to enter *into a Herd of Swine*, (which yet would have seem'd no strange thing in the sight of the Jews,) before they had an exprefs Command from our Lord's own Mouth so to do. *Mat. viii. 32. He said unto them, Go. St. John* informs us, that *1 John iii. 8.---* *for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil.* And it is our Lord's own triumphant Declaration, *John xii. 31. Now shall the Prince of this World be cast out.* And how glorious an Accomplishment this Prediction has since had, how the Devils actually have been dislodged from the Temples of the Heathens, and their lying Oracles put to silence; how their usurped Dominion over the Bodies of Men has been taken away, and the Diabolical Practice of human Sacrifices utterly abolish'd, this can't but

but be known; and if it is not seriously consider'd and laid to heart, we shew ourselves altogether unworthy of so great Benefits of the Gospel. Now after this manifest Defeat of *Satan*, for any to go about to re-establish his Dominion in the World, nay to give him the Exercise of more Power, than he was ever yet possess'd of, or rather to give a new and unheard-of Power to a Sett of infamous Wretches, to compel evil Spirits to be their Ministers, in executing their wicked Purposes: What is this but to deny the salutary Effects of the Gospel, at the expence of giving the lye to our Redeemer, and contradicting even the very Testimony of our Senses?

F I N I S.

